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RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000526

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STATE FOR AF/W  
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STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND MSTUCKART  
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY  
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK  
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR  
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH  
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)  
SUBJECT: MASSOB PRESSES FOR UWAZURUIKE'S RELEASE

REF: 04 LAGOS 2227

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Classified By: Acting Consul General Donald McConnell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: Representatives of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) explained to Poloff the case of their detained leader, Ralph Uwazuruike, in prison on treason charges. MASSOB claimed President Umaru Yar'Adua should release Uwazuruike as he has released other leaders under similar charges, though MASSOB itself will seek nothing less than a Biafran state. MASSOB representatives argued the April election would be a boon to the organization as Igbos realized they had no meaningful role to play in the national government. End summary.

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MASSOB's Objective Remains for a Sovereign State  
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12. (C) On July 19, Chidi Ofoegbu, a member of the Biafran Foundation (BF), and Gideon Nwachukwu, Director of Health for MASSOB, met Poloff. Ngozi Uwazuruike, the MASSOB leader's wife, had originally planned to attend but cancelled. BF is the MASSOB organization for members outside Nigeria, Ofoegbu explained, as the organizations work in concert with each other. BF maintains a Biafran House in Washington DC which acts as its mission in the United States, as well as a website, [www.biafraland.com](http://www.biafraland.com). Ofoegbu complained that they had been harassed by the police when they went to the British High Commission, but he said there had been no harassment on their trip to the Consulate.

13. (C) MASSOB's mission remained to press for a sovereign state of Biafra, Ofoegbu stated. Easterners remained marginalized in Nigerian politics, and Biafra was the desire of every Igbo person outside and inside Nigeria, he asserted. MASSOB claimed the same borders as the old Biafran state, although the area included many non-Igbos Ofoegbu maintained

this would not cause problems. (Note: The claimed Biafran borders included all five states of the Southeast and five of the six states of the South-South, excepting Edo. The MASSOB assertion that a new Biafra would not be a problem for resident non-Igbos seems in blatant disregard of prior history. End note)

14. (C) Although intentionally vague in his description, Nwachukwu described MASSOB as operating as a shadow government with cabinet posts and assignments. Uwazuruike headed MASSOB in the Southeast, but during his detention Nnamdi Okeagu has served as acting leader. While MASSOB had clandestine representative offices throughout the Southeast, the organization suffered harassment in the region from police and the Special Security Service (SSS), Ofoegbu commented.

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April Elections a Boon for MASSOB  
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15. (C) Ofoegbu explained the BF directive for this meeting was to press for the release of Uwazuruike. MASSOB did not concern itself with politics, Ofoegbu stated, except to aim for sovereignty and an independent Biafran state, which they hoped to accomplish through a United Nations-sponsored referendum. However, MASSOB believes the recent elections advanced the Biafran cause, the Owerri native argued. In most places in the Southeast no elections were held, disenfranchising Igbos. (Note: Uwazuruike himself was a former People's Democratic Party (PDP) member who left the party in 1999 to found MASSOB (reftel). End note) With no faith in politics, the elections presented Igbos more reason to agitate for sovereignty, Ofoegbu said, terming President Umaru Yar'Adua and Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan a product of a fraudulent system and surrogates for an existing power

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structure. (Note: MASSOB publicly denied any connection with flyers announcing a May sit-at-home strike to protest the April elections, claiming the strike was instigated by disgruntled politicians and not by MASSOB. End note)

16. (C) Despite the group's distaste for the current incumbents and for politics, the recent releases from detention of Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) leader Mujahid Dokubo-Asari and Oodua People's Congress (OPC) leader Gani Adams have spurred hope for Uwazuruike's release. Ofoegbu contended that unlike the OPC and NDPVF, MASSOB pursued separatism through non-violent means, and Uwazuruike should be released. To court the Yoruba vote, Obasanjo ignored the OPC's separatist aims and unconditionally released Adams before the April election, Ofoegbu remarked. Dokubo-Asari likewise espoused violence but was released on health grounds, Ofoegbu said. Uwazuruike's continued detention results from animus toward the Igbos, Ofoegbu declared, but the agitation would not stop and holding Uwazuruike would only make it worse.

17. (C) While MASSOB has not in the past and does not now promote the use of violence, Ofoegbu said he could not guarantee the younger generation would adhere only to peaceful methods. In any event, MASSOB would support the use of force to defend itself, Ofoegbu remarked defiantly.

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Uwazuruike Too Candid in His Goals to be Released  
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18. (C) When Poloff asked why the government continued to detain Uwazuruike, Ofoegbu contended this was probably because, unlike the OPC, MASSOB had been candid about their desire for a sovereign state. During court proceedings in Abuja on July 17, the presiding judge refused to release Uwazuruike, saying as the MASSOB leader still agitated for a separate nation, the treason charge remained valid. In

closing, Ofoegbu asked the State Department to register him as a prisoner of conscience, and said he had already sent reports to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Ironically, the new government MASSOB representatives dismissed as irrelevant may be Uwazuruike's best hope for release. It remains to be seen whether Igbos believe themselves sufficiently disenfranchised, in the wake of fraudulent elections, to support MASSOB or other separatist movements as Ofoegbu predicts.

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